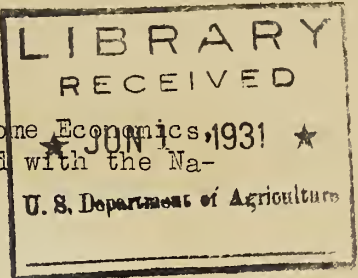


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HOW MUCH TIME TO CARE FOR SMALL CHILDREN



A radio talk by Miss Hildegard Kneeland, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered through WRC and 42 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, Thursday, May 21, 1931.

The notion is generally held, especially by the masculine half of the population, that the housewife is a lady of leisure. So many household chores are supposed to have vanished from the home that the housewife has theoretically nothing to do but put on her best bib and tucker and listen to the radio or go to a bridge party. But certainly for millions of homemakers this is all too far from the truth, and especially of the mother of small children it is not often true. Her schedule is full to overflowing. The usual household tasks - the cooking, dish-washing, cleaning, and laundering - simply have to be accomplished along with the care of the children. This double duty brings the mother's working hours to a total far beyond what would be considered reasonable in any of the occupations listed by the Census. In industry we have long had the standard eight-hour day, with one day off in seven, and in many industries we are now getting the 44 and even the 40-hour week. For the housewife with small children such working hours would seem like a real vacation. To her a working week of 70 hours is nothing out of the ordinary -- a schedule of 10 hours of work a day for the seven days of the week is taken for granted.

Do I seem to you to exaggerate? If so, let me explain that these statements are not merely opinions -- the Bureau has figures to prove them. Several thousand homemakers have put down for us in black and white the time which they spent on their various tasks during a typical week. These records show that the farm homemaker with a baby under a year spends 73 hours a week on the job. This time does not include taking the baby out for an airing or playing with him; it all goes in actual work. 44 hours a week are spent in general housework -- which amounts to about a full-time job in itself; 9 additional hours are spent in doing the farm chores -- caring for poultry and milk, tending to the garden, and other miscellaneous jobs; and 20 hours a week, or about 3 hours a day, are spent in the actual care of the baby and older children -- in bathing, dressing, feeding, and tending them.

There are people who are ready to grant that the farm homemaker with small children is overworked, but who feel sure that the city homemaker is wasting away in idleness! What are the facts of the case as shown by the Bureau studies? We have some figures here for a group of city homemakers, all college graduates, who have very comfortable incomes and can afford a certain amount of paid help. Even under these favorable circumstances the mother with a baby under a year, spends 24 hours a week in the care of children and 34 hours in housekeeping, making a total of 58 hours a week, which by any reasonable standard is more than a full-time job.

The main problem of you who are mothers with small children, is then, not how to fill up your leisure time but how to get some leisure! This really becomes a problem of reducing the hours you spend in housework, since otherwise you cannot give the necessary time to your children without being overworked. I see several possibilities of lightening the working schedule of the mother:- One is having more jobs done outside of the

home, by the laundry, the bakery, the commercial cannery, and so on. Another is buying labor saving equipment and rearranging the working centers for efficiency. A third is hiring more paid help and getting better cooperation of the children and adults other than mother. But my best suggestion, since it makes no demand on the family pocketbook, is to simplify your job in every possible way, to cut out the frills and furbelows of housekeeping. Plan simple meals with no complicated dishes that require a great deal of your time to prepare. Use no unnecessary dishes in serving, and avoid table linen that is difficult to launder. When your dishes are washed and scalded, let them drain dry. Study your housekeeping to see where you can cut the corners without lowering your standard in any way that really matters. And at the same time make use of the children, both for your sake and theirs. Remember that the child who learns to dress and undress himself at an early age, who puts away his own things, and little by little takes over small tasks about the house, is forming habits that will be useful all of his life.